MEMORIES of SERVICE IN FRANCE

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MARION GREGORY

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MEMORIES OF SERVICE IN FRANCE

BY
MARION GREGORY

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Dedicated to

LIONEL AND FLORENCE

From

Their Loving God-Mother

July, 1918.

FOREWORD

On November 3, 1917, I sailed on the French steamer *Espagne* with Dr. Caroline Finley, Director of the Woman's Oversea Hospitals. My connection with this organization was Paris Agent, which chiefly meant interpreting. This occupation brought me in contact with many interesting men connected with the French Government, who always showed our organization the greatest courtesy, interest and appreciation. That we had to wait some months before our work was under way was the fault of the progress of the war, not from any lack of interest of the Government. From the Ministry of War

down to the Mayor of the town where we finally were placed, everyone took a personal interest in our welfare and did their best to help our undertaking.

In my spare moments I devoted much time to singing in the French hospitals, and for our own men through the Y. M. C. A.—and the last ten days of my stay I worked in their Canteen at Bordeaux.

I make this introduction to tell my friends, at a glance, what I was doing in France,—and the following little memories are merely personal experiences, which I hope may prove of some interest.

MEMORIES OF SERVICE IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

PARIS

Arriving in Paris November, 1917, gave me a very different sensation than in the days before the war. The journey up from Bordeaux had not been a preparation for what was to follow, for the landing there was simple enough except in the matter of cabs, and the journey up by train as quick and comfortable as in happier days. But Paris made one feel the nearness of the enemy —women-porters pushing trucks full of luggage, women to carry the bags, with a few stray men to help with the heaviest tasks. The Bordeaux day-

train arrives at 8.30 in the evening, and the lack of taxis and cabs is the first real discomfort which greets the traveler—the few in sight have generally been engaged in some mysterious manner.

After a forty-five minute wait, two kindly Italian gentlemen, fellow passengers on the ship, took compassion on me and asked me to share their omnibus as far as their hotel. I gladly accepted this, and at the rue Castiglione found a night-hawk who consented to take me home for three times the legal fare. Oh, the first sight of those darkened streets of Paris!—occasionally a gas lamp shaded from the top, casting a feeble reflection, directly underneath was the principal lighting, giving the feeling of Paris in the days of the Three Musketeers. In November motors still had the

lamps, and there was much more light generally than two months later when the air raids made Paris an inferno; but it seemed blackness itself to one so recently from the over-lighted American cities.

After the terrible raid of January 30, 1918, the only lights allowed were those pale street-lamps and the blue lights at the subway entrances. Not a glimmer was permitted from the houses, and the dangers of getting about made going out at night too difficult a thing to undertake for pleasure. In the day-time, Paris, up to March, seemed very like the beautiful city we loved, people young and old going about their duties and pleasures much as usual. The theaters and movies did a paying business, for after two years of no amusements the people were hungry for diversion.

I was in much better luck than most American workers in Paris, as I had a charming home there with my aunt, Mrs. Pratt. She has lived there more than half her life and has a delightful circle of friends. I had known many of these people for years, as I had known France,—superficially—but I never realized how splendid they were nor how wonderful was France. This great country and her people have gone deep into my heart, for I honor them as well as love them.

Getting about Paris at this time was quite a problem. The Metro and trams were so crowded, the taxis and the impossible horse-cabs had developed such an independence that they would not take you unless the direction suited them,—the taxis had some reason for this owing to their small allowance of

gasoline. So I decided the best thing to do was to have a coupe by the month. In old days this was not an extravagance, but now it is. Our old man and returned war-horse proved a boon, and we were so thankful to have them, ramshackle though they were. The old man was terrified of going out at night, as one of his colleagues had been killed by a motor-truck running into his coupe in the dark. As we were equally frightened, we only went out twice at night in five months.

The traffic in Paris has always been a menace to the pedestrian, and now it is worse as so many inexperienced men are driving the taxis. I have been going to Paris for twenty years and always felt some day I would be run over, and on January 10, 1918, that long-expected experience arrived. A taxi

charged down upon me and I lay apparently dead at the foot of George Washington's statue in the Place d' Iena. I knew I wasn't dead as I felt the snow and slush seeping through all my winter clothing and thought I felt like a piece of blotting paper. I proved to be stunned, but most miraculously unhurt. Thick snow and winter clothing had proved my salvation; so I put this down as another war-time experience.

The social side of life in Paris was very changed—no big dinners, no dancing, and no evening dress. At the opera there was a sign in the lobby about no evening dress permitted. All the heretofore society people had some special personal interest in helping to alleviate war conditions. The only form of entertaining was an occasional luncheon or

tea, and you were much more welcome as a guest if you brought your own sugar and bread, as these were under Government control and no influence could buy you more than your allotment. There were not many discomforts, but whatever existed were accepted without a murmur by all classes.

One had to try to get used to seeing maimed men everywhere. At first it was heartrending for the newcomer, but it was beautiful to see the care and devotion shown the returned *mutiles* by everyone. The theaters were filled with these patient sufferers. I have often seen rows of blind men—one time I can never forget—the well-acted play had for the hero a man blinded in the war. To watch the faces of the real blind men was a wonderful study.

Saturday, March 23rd, was the only

time I saw the great people of Paris falter—no panic—no excitement, but a cessation of the daily round of life. That was the first day of the big gun. It began at seven-thirty in the morning and went on all day at intervals of fifteen minutes, no one knowing what it was. We all thought for hours it was the long-expected daylight raid, and for the first time I went to the cellar; but an hour under ground, with a candle the only light, was enough for me, and I went up again to the apartment, which was on the first floor and for that reason considered safe during raids. I even went out at noon, finding the streets deserted, and had to walk to my appointment. On my return a terrible explosion seemed to go off directly over my head, but there was nothing to be seen. I ran to shelter with a few others

in sight. The shops and public offices were all closed; and the Metro stopped running that day; but the next day when they learned the unbelievable news that they were fired on from the very front, the great people of Paris settled down once more to the normal things of life, paying no heed to the constant firing of "La Grosse Berthe"—she became a part of every-day life.

The night raids were horrible. No words can convey the sickening sensation of hearing the explosion of a bomb. The firing of the defense is nerve-racking, but when the horrible bomb comes one's heart is cold at the thought of what it means. Before April 1st three raids were in our neighborhood, and the strain of living through them was very great. By that time Paris was protecting some of her beautiful buildings, but before

the January raid no preparation of this kind had been made.

When the March advance began, Paris quickly showed the effect of the departure of many thousands. People with old folk and children did well to go. Very unexpectedly, my own work called me away the 8th of April, and I was not sorry to get away from the strain of the cannon by day and the raids by night.

Soon I found myself in the quiet, peaceful Midi, where only the cuckoo sang all day and the nightingale at night.

CHAPTER II

THREE CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

This memory is so precious to me that I fear I cannot adequately convey it to my readers. December 19th I was invited to give a Christmas program of songs at a hospital in Paris. This was a beautiful private house, which the family had given over to the care of the wounded. Mme. S. herself was the head nurse—a wonderful woman, who, from the beginning, had given her personal service and devotion to the soldiers of France. She had fifty beds on the en-

trance-floor of the house; two big salons, dining-room and large conservatory had become perfect hospital wards. Upstairs were operating rooms, etc., the family living on the second floor.

There are no trained nurses in France. The nuns are the nearest approach to the trained women, so that most of the nursing there has been done by the ladies and by women of the people, who, through bitter experiences, have become excellent nurses.

On arriving at the hospital at two o'clock, I found thirty-five of the fifty patients assembled in the conservatory ward. All wore their uniform overcoat and cap, as the cold was intense. Several guests had been invited, including a General and an Abbe, and many friends of the soldiers. It was a strange audience. Nearly all those not in uniform

were in deep mourning, even my dear friend the accompanist and myself. All sat in their outdoor garments, and while singing I had to wear a fur coat and my frozen breath showed white. But there was nothing cold or freezing about that audience—their appreciation of my songs and their applause was so real and overwhelming it nearly unnerved me. I had to repeat many things, the greatest favorite being the ordinary recruiting song used by our soldiers, "Joan of Arc." They were so excited over the thought of Americans singing to their beloved Joan, I had to sing this eight times. Fortunately there were French words, but twice they asked for it in English. The final time they joined me in the catchy air.

After it was all over, their eagerness to take my hand and have a special word

was touching, and I had to go to the beds of those too ill to be present but who had heard the music. I remember one big black soldier from Martinique, who was dying of pneumonia. He asked to see the lady who sang, so I held his poor hot hand and talked for a few minutes. One man who showed great eagerness to address me burst out in English, "Oh, Miss, I'm so happy to see you. I live in New York, and am so homesick to return." He was very proud of being the only one present who could speak English, and my coming from New York was a great joy to him. I left amid blessings, and requests to return soon, which I am sorry to say I was not able to carry out.

The next day, to my surprise, there was an article in a Paris paper about my singing, which was very gratifying and

complimentary. It seemed one of the soldiers was a reporter for this paper, and in this way showed his personal appreciation.

That night I left for Dinard in Brittany, where I went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Deming Jarves in their charming home Val Fleuri. I left Paris in a heavy snow-storm, sitting up all night in an ordinary first-class carriage. My companion was an interesting young woman returning from seeing a dying brother. She told me of another brother who had just received the Academy prize for the best book of the year; she was so proud of her two soldiers, the youngest of whom she was to lose so soon.

I found no snow at Dinard but it was bitterly cold, and the big open fires at Val Fleuri were a great comfort. This was my first visit to Brittany and my

kind hosts made my stay a very happy and interesting one.

Christmas Day brought the most wonderful experience of my service in France. In fact, the most beautiful of all my musical life. There were several hospitals at Dinard, but the largest was the old Hotel Royal where they had 350 wounded men. Here, as usual, all the nursing was done by the ladies and the menial work by those strange little Anamites, who are like tiny Japs. Christmas Day the patients were to have a dinner and a tree, and they asked me to give them a concert before the dinner. The entrance hall was an enormous place. At one end was a raised platform by which we placed the piano—a good one this time, as we rented it for the occasion. I arrived early to see about the placing of this, and saw my audience

assembling. Over thirty were brought down on stretchers; the first row of these were directly at my feet. Several of these men had not been out of bed before in from a year to twenty-one months, others sat in wheel-chairs or on sofas and chairs. The place was very full as many came from outside. My accompanist was a Belgian soldier who had been at the Conservatory at Liege; he was a good musician and played well. For a moment I nearly lost courage facing this audience. The pathetic faces at my feet gazing at me, and the rows and rows of mutilated men,—the bravest, most patient, saddest and most inspiring audience before which I have ever appeared. It was with faltering tones I began that beautiful Noel of Adam; but soon the response from those faces and the tumultuous applause after

each verse gave me the needed courage, and I forgot all personal feeling in the glory of the music. Here again, as in Paris, the soldiers' song, "Joan of Arc," was repeated several times in French and English, and brought forth cheers for "Les Americains." I will never forget the thrill of singing La Marseillaise that day, and the memory of those hundreds of voices when they joined me in the chorus. There were about thirty men who were unable to be brought down. These I went to see afterward, bringing each one some special presents. Can anyone wonder that this day will always mean a perfect memory to me?

On the 27th, Mrs. Jarves took me in her motor about fifty miles away to Cambourg where I had been asked to repeat my Dinard program. We broke the law in going this distance by motor,

but paying a fine made that all right when our mission was understood. The Château de Cambourg is one of the most interesting in France to-day—Chateaubriand lived there at one time, and the present owner is his great niece, the Countess de Durfort. This young woman, famous for her beauty, is one of the splendid workers in France. She and her husband have turned this country home into a hospital for convalescent soldiers, and give most of their time to the care of these men. She was particularly interested in the care of the blind and had studied the Braille system herself, so she could teach it to the men. The Château is in a spacious estate—one part of it was built in the 11th Century, and the newest part in the 15th. About forty years ago it was put in good repair and is as comfortable as

such an ancient building can be made to live in. The rooms are large and impressive, but in spite of the thickness of the walls it is very cold.

On this occasion a lady from the village played for me, and, as usual, I ended with La Marseillaise. After that the Count de Durfort came to me and said the soldiers hoped I would sing the "Star Spangled Banner." Very stupidly I did not have it with me, so I had to sing it without music, and I laughingly remarked, "I fear I do not know the words of my own national hymn as well as I know yours," and a little soldier in the front rose and said, "Fear nothing, Mademoiselle, I know the words and will help you." He had lived in Montreal for a while as a teacher in a school, but all things American appealed to him, and he had learned these

words which seemed so difficult for me to remember, although I have sung my national air countless times, and love it, too.

I will always look back on my eight days in Brittany during war-time with greatest pleasure. I left with regret, but my real duties called me back at the New Year.

CHAPTER III

TEN MILES BEHIND THE FRONT

When we left New York, we expected to accomplish our advance work for the unit very quickly; but three days after sailing we heard the entire French Cabinet had been changed. This meant a long wait for us, until the new officials could attend to placing us.

Our work was intended for the care of women and children in the devastated area. Our personnel was entirely of women, we were supported by women, the money coming through the Suffrage party. As we were under the French Government, we could not belong to

our own Red Cross, but this wonderful organization has aided us in many ways, giving us the money for the equipment of our first hospital.

The first suggestion for our work was about ten miles back of the front as it was in January. In theory this was ideal, for this situation would have made ambulance service to three departments a possibility; we could have served the Aisne, Oise and Somme.

On January 4th, at seven in the morning, Dr. Finley and I started for the Gare du Nord, where we were met by Major Rist of the Tardieu Commission. The great, gloomy, dark station was filled with ghostly figures, all soldiers going directly back to the lines—one felt in a dream seeing this through a cold mist, for it was still dark when we reached the station. We had to have

special war-zone passes, with our photographs and all the reasons of our going so near the front. We kept these red books in our hands most of the time. As Dr. Finley and I were not then in uniform, we were all the more questioned; later, when the unit arrived, we all wore uniforms, and they seemed as much a pass as our red books.

There was much snow everywhere, beautiful, fresh, crisp snow, and the air was very cold but still—a glorious winter day with a bright sun. All our fellow passengers were officers and soldiers. At Compiegne, Dr. Finley and I had to get out and go to the station to have our papers stamped, as this was the entrance to the war zone.

Very soon we saw our first wrecked villages, broken bridges, old trenches and barbed-wire entanglements. I

could only feel as if I were at the cinema; I could not feel I was looking at the real thing, but when I realized this I felt my indignation getting almost beyond control. Those pitiful homes—most of them poor ones—sometimes half a house left, with the family making the best of things; but in most cases utter ruin. The ruthlessness of it struck me as no reading or hearsay had ever done; seeing and living through it is the only way to realize the horror of this terrible war.

On arriving at Noyon, we were met by the Sous Prefet of Ham, a gentleman well fitted for his difficult task, full of enthusiasm and very thorough in his work. To our surprise we found a good hotel, only open a few days. A man and his wife who ran a small hotel in Paris had taken this old building, one wing

of which was the house where Calvin was born.* They put it in good order with new furniture, etc., and provided an excellent cuisine. They felt it would be a good investment, as Noyon was then headquarters for the French army —poor souls, I often wonder where they are now, and if the gentle little hunchback maid who waited on me was able to escape when Noyon fell for the second time into enemy hands. After lunch we went in Mons. Dupin's motor about seven miles to the little town of Guiscard. The road looked so different from any in France, at first I could not see why, then I knew it was because there was not a single tree on either side all the way to Guiscard. This was the famous road when the Germans in retreat cut all the great trees and laid

* Completely destroyed in August retreat.

them across the road to prevent the French from following them quickly.

Guiscard looked so peaceful in the winter sunshine. This little place at that time was practically untouched, while Chauny, nearby, was near complete ruin. The houses were generally only one or two stories—we went directly to the Commandant's headquarters, which was one of these little one-story plaster houses. There we met Commandant M., a fine old soldier, over sixty years of age, more than six feet in height and as straight and strong as a man of forty. His was a delightful personality. He was very proud of his English—in fact, we found him reading the "Merchant of Venice"—and soon concluded most of his English was Shakesperean.

We walked about the town, always in

sound of the cannon at the front, and found the three houses selected for us. They were the best in the village,—country villas in their lovely gardens—the three properties adjoining. They were still in use as hospitals for the French army, but we were told that the French were leaving this immediate neighborhood and they would soon be empty. The reason for this was that the British were coming to replace them. This, of course, made a new complication, for we would have to get their consent as well—we met the English Colonel, who was most cordial, but his was not the final word. When we returned to headquarters we had an interesting peep into history, as a French General had arrived from the front. He was so startled on seeing two ladies in this place, it was quite an amusing incident.

Next day we stopped at Compiegne, where I saw my old friend Zella de Milhau, who was doing splendid work there with her ambulance.

Then came a long wait in Paris. Our papers of permission came from the highest French authority, but the English General refused permission, as he would not allow women so near the lines. Our disappointment was great, but we soon learned to bless him for his wisdom, for Guiscard was one of the first places to fall in the March advance.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S OVERSEA HOSPITAL NO. 1

LATE in February the first unit sailed. They heard only the day before of our losing Guiscard, but as the difficulty of getting twenty-four women off to France is great, they did not postpone the sailing. Dr. Finley and I went to Bordeaux to meet them and were greatly aided in our arrangements by the kindly officials of the Y. M. C. A. We were proud of the appearance of our women—the doctors in their well-fitting uniforms, and the nurses, aids, chauffeurs, etc., in their distinctive dress. The party received hearty cheers

when riding through Bordeaux to the station.

Our second assignment was Vic-sur-Aisne, very near Soissons. There was a slight delay, owing to the owner of the houses holding back the papers, but they were in our hands the very morning of the big drive—fortunately we had not signed, for this section soon became the center of fighting.

It was then the Service de Sante asked for part of the unit to aid at a French military hospital, so Dr. Finley decided to split the unit, taking one-half with her to the military work; the rest were left to carry out the original plan of care for women and children, and were placed under the direction of my sister, Dr. Alice Gregory.

When the French Government, through Commandant Welter of the

Cabinet of the Ministry of War, asked us to go to the Department of Landes to establish a hospital for refugees, we had no idea of the neighboorhood to which we had been assigned; but we soon grew to love this quaint part of France, so little known to the traveler, and to have a very real affection for the people of this large Department.

Our journey down was made at a difficult moment, when the Port of Bordeaux was closed on account of the movement of troops. At that time the American army was arriving in vast numbers, so no ordinary traveling was permitted over the Orleans railway. All that section of the country was temporarily declared in the army zone, so that special passes were required which, in ordinary cases, took at least two weeks; but as we were under the Gov-

ernment ours were procured in twenty-four hours. The ordinary traveler at that time was permitted no luggage beyond what he could carry, and even with all our official papers and letters we had difficulty and nearly lost our train through waiting permission from the Chef de Gare to take our luggage. Traveling in France is wonderfully little affected outside the actual fighting districts, and we made the long journey of fourteen hours to Mont de Marsan as comfortably as could have been done at any time.

This quaint town is the capital of Les Landes. The Prefet of the district resides there in more or less shabby pomp; the house given to this official is a fine old building, back of which is a really beautiful public park. The residence is connected with the offices of State,

and it is surprising to find what a lot of business there is to be done in this corner of France. It is the great wood district—miles and miles of pine forests represent the riches of this department, and factories for preparing the wood, and for turpentine, are all over the surrounding country. This is one of the special departments to which the refugees are being sent, because of these conditions. All the factories are making pieces for the portable houses in which the Government is housing these unhappy people, for now they are trying to keep families together as much as possible and provide them with temporary homes. Mont de Marsan is very Spanish in character; it is near enough the border to take on the color, and even part of the language, of the neighboring country. The Spanish roof is much

in evidence on the houses, and the lace mantilla is quite often seen on the women. We had no idea what a curiosity we were going to be, but soon learned we were the first American women ever seen there and our uniforms proved of tremendous interest.

The Landes officials decided that the best place for our work would be Labouheyre, a small town of 1,600 inhabitants on the line from Bordeaux to Biarritz. On our arrival there we were met by a large number of people, including M. Bacon, the mayor. No words can adequately tell of the kindness and courtesy of this French gentleman; he thought of everything for our comfort, and helped us in many ways. In the first place, as there is only a tiny inn at Labouheyre, he found us billets in the town, taking five of us to

live in his own house. The unit all met at the inn for dinner and supper. Four were living with an interesting woman, a financier in her own way; she was the grain merchant of the place, a rich widow, and as there was no bank in the town, she kept an enormous amount of money in the house—but no one would dream of robbing her. Five others of the unit had rooms at the inn, so we were more or less comfortably fixed for the six weeks before our buildings were ready. These houses were the Government shacks altered to suit our requirements. The question of labor for putting them up was solved by the assignment of thirty German prisoners. These sturdy, well-fed Teutons had been prisoners from the first of the war, and their appearance spoke louder than words of the splendid care the French

had given them. The men behaved well and made the situation easy for us by ignoring our presence; they looked through us as we looked through them. We conversed with only one, who was brought by the guard to be cured of a sore throat.

The mayor gave us part of his property for our buildings, for our living quarters the part which had been his pheasant-run. This is a well-shaded place, which is necessary in summer as the Midi sun is a scorching one. The hospital buildings are near by on a little higher ground. Our rooms are most comfortable, giving the effect of camping out in the Adirondacks; our dwelling houses have three rooms, each with a large French window and its own front door, two people in each room. The beds are of the American army

type, with good springs and mattresses, the furniture simple but adequate, and the muslin and chintz curtains give a homelike air. The dining-room is quite large, taking two-thirds of a building, the kitchen taking the other third. Our woman carpenter did splendid work in making the dining-room table, sideboard, benches and cupboards. We were justly proud of her work, which was a sensation to the French people, who would steal in and stand in groups to see a woman saw wood. The recreation room and store room form part of this group of buildings. The offices, dispensary, operating room, sterilizing room and wards form the main hospital group; the operating room painted white inside, with its skylight window, is a triumph. Our eleven buildings made a good showing for six weeks'

work. But even before things were in working order, we heard that the Government wished us to enlarge our work, to double the number of buildings, and this is now under way, for we not only have refugees to care for but have become a departmental hospital with a large area to cover.

Our real work began long before the buildings were ready; fortunately we had our two ambulances, for we had calls from miles around. The Army Doctor, who had charge of five towns in the neighborhood, left soon after our arrival, as the people did not like him and preferred coming to us. He was not interested in his work and was glad to hand it over, so it was a good thing for everyone. Our doctors made devoted admirers of our patients; they quickly earned the gratitude and affec-

tion of these dear people of Les Landes, and when the day came for the dedication ceremony, the people entered into it with all their hearts.

It was a beautiful day after much rain. The priest came early, before the Government officials, and blessed the beds, as Church and State do not meet upon the same ground in France; after he had gone the Prefet, with several dignitaries from Mont de Marsan, and a neighboring Mayor arrived. Our own Mayor was away, but sent a representative. The speeches were all excellent, the most applauded being that of Dr. Gregory, who made her maiden speech, and in a foreign tongue. She touched the hearts of all present with her simple, well-chosen words. The Prefet made a very fine speech, and the surprise of the day came

when one hundred and fifty school children sang our difficult national anthem in English and in French. It was a touching tribute from these simple people. The American Army Band which was sent to assist us, played as only an army band can, and the Prefet raised a beautiful French flag while the "Marseillaise" was played, and Dr. Gregory raised the American flag while the band played the "Star Spangled Banner." Several hundred people took part in these ceremonies, and we were able to give them delicious refreshments made in our own kitchen. It was a day ever to be remembered in our quiet little town.

Within a few days the wards were nearly full, and we now have five dispensaries in neighboring towns. Dr. Gregory, who made this undertaking

the success it is, has handed over the splendid work to her successor, Dr. Formad, for now her own country and her own army have asked for her services, and she has gone to the front.* In the meantime, the hospital will go on under the excellent direction of Dr. Formad, and will continue to help the suffering women and children of France and bring pride and joy to the women at home who are making this great work possible through their generous donations to the Woman's Suffrage Party.

* Dr. Gregory is at the front, but still in the service of France—under the Service de Santé—caring for the Poilus.

CHAPTER V

REFUGEES

The tremendous influx of refugees into Paris from their devastated homes was appalling during the first weeks of the March advance. The situation was wonderfully managed by the Government, with the aid of the American Red Cross and kindred societies. On our journey to the Midi we passed hundreds in the trains,—they never knew where they were going, but their acceptance of the situation and uncomplaining faith that their Government would care for them was very wonderful. One girl we spoke to had been

fifteen days on the journey. There were many children in this group; fortunately some of our women had a lot of chocolate which we passed over to the children in the train on the next track. One family told me they had had just ten minutes to escape. This meant no time to dress and all their clothes had been provided by other refugees along the road—they saw their home in flames as they walked away. But it was the very old who filled the heart with most pity, they looked so like frightened, hurt children with their poor little bundles, generally containing some useless article—in fact one old woman had carefully wrapped up the works of her clock. The only comfort was that the families had been kept together, and the plan of the Government was to billet

them until the shacks could be ready.

In Labouheyre there was a very large village green. This was laid out in streets of these houses and in the center a common kitchen. When I left this was not yet in working order, but well on the way, and I heard in June that the first refugees had arrived.

The plan was to have the strong ones work in the various factories about the town; there were several families already installed there for a year or more who had worked this way. One enterprising woman followed her soldier husband who had been sent there for work. They lived in a shed, the wife had a vegetable stall protected from the sun by a piece of cloth on two poles, and her wares were displayed on boards; she had good things and made enough to live on. Her baby, Clarette, aged three,

was a special sweetheart of mine, and never let me pass without bringing me some nuts or a fig in her grimy hand—I much preferred the nuts under the circumstances.

Another family whose father, also a returned soldier who had been sent to the wood factory, were very interesting to me. They were from the north, the Ardennes, and were not welcome in this community as they were strolling gypsies. Before the war they had lived in wagons and traveled about with a moving-picture show. The children—seven living out of thirteen—had all been born in these wagons, and living in their shack of a house in one spot was very trying to them. The oldest, Palmyre, was a bold, handsome girl of nineteen—she was desperately unhappy in her longing for the road. Her work used

to be singing during the cimera performance, as did her thirteen-year-old sister Rosetta. She dogged my footsteps with questions of America and how to get there. She had written to a cinema company in Chicago, sending her picture, and they replied they would use her for acting. I did my best to dissuade her. To my surprise I found she had a really lovely voice. A poor Belgian used to travel about with them playing the piano, and he had taught her—poor child, her future seems a dark one, but the adoration of the whole family for her is extraordinary. They go without that she may have, and their three-room, unpainted shack, bore the name Villa Palmyre.

On account of my knowledge of French, I was thrown in contact with our first cases—later the others became

more used to things and did not need me so much, but I enjoyed coming into such close personal touch with these people. The whole family and all the neighbors of my first special patient looked upon me as something from Heaven; to my own surprise and happiness I found them believing with utmost faith every word I said, and in a few minutes I had stopped the wild sobs and fears of fifteen people who were gathered at her bedside, at once. Fortunately for me, as well as for this poor soul, all my predictions came true. I was sorry to leave this part of the work, but I found that the climate of the Midi did not agree with me so I could not remain.

CHAPTER VI

ARMY NEIGHBORS

WITHIN a radius of from fifteen to fifty miles we had for neighbors several camps of American soldiers, all engineers doing important work. Labouheyre was quite a railway center for them, so we were in touch with these men. In fact, we soon found our army took a very real interest in our work, from the General in command at Tours, the General at Bordeaux, to the Majors and Captains in our neighborhood.

An order was given to supply us with gasoline, which was a tremendous boon, for that is an impossible commodity in

France, and we had frequent gifts of white bread and were always invited to any special celebration or entertainment. We were able on several occasions to be of assistance in return—in the matter of a dentist, for instance, when the army man had been called to the front and left hundreds of aching teeth, our young woman gladly went to a camp twenty miles away and worked hard three days a week before our hospital was ready. One day our ambulance came along ten minutes after a bad accident—we found a smashed automobile, an injured chauffeur, and two fortunately unhurt Majors. We took them to their camp about fifty miles away from the scene of their accident, and this incident strengthened our growing popularity. As we had offered our services to our own army, through

our Government, and had been refused owing to our being women, such experiences were very gratifying.

One night we had a delightful experience. It was before we were installed, so we were all able to accept the invitation of the Major at P. We went over in one of our big White ambulances and dined with the officers. About twenty-five sat down to a delicious meal; then we went to the village green to hear Elsie Janis give her inimitable entertainment. The boys had built a high platform at one end of the green and put a tent on it—this proved a splendid place, in spite of Miss Janis' fears—at that time she had not sung or spoken in the open air, but I am sure she has many times since as this was such a huge success. Men came from nearby camps, so in all there were over twelve

hundred, and it was a delightful experience to watch these faces and hear their roars of laughter, and the jolly singing, for Elsie had us all singing with her before it was over.

Five hundred men came on flat cars run on a narrow-guage road. They sat back to back, and as they started off in the sunset looked like a huge centipede in the distance. The performance was at seven, as Miss Janis had to give another performance that same evening at a Canadian camp. She was delighted to see the members of the unit as she had crossed over with them, and this gave her the inspiration to do an imitation of herself giving her entertainment on a lurching ship, which was most amusing.

Owing to the great difficulty of transportation, we were delayed in getting

our furniture down from Bordeaux; so our army came to our rescue and sent down two huge motor-trucks with the things. These trucks then proceeded to a neighboring camp to take back men, etc., so we did not interfere with the rules of the army. The Perfet was most grateful for this assistance from the Americans. By the time we were ready for the hospital ward furniture, he was able to make special arrangements with the railroad, so we did not have to bother our good army friends again.

One day after I had left, a great General from Tours took us in on his tour of inspection of camps, and honored the unit by taking lunch with them. So you can understand between the loving gratitude of the French and the interest of their own people, this little band of

women working in this far-away spot is not lonely, for they are surrounded by the truest of friends.

CHAPTER VII

SINGING FOR THE Y. M. C. A.

Before leaving New York, I received a letter from one of the principal officials of the Y. M. C. A., asking me if I would have free time to sing for the American soldiers. I replied I would be very glad to do so whenever possible. I am very proud that I had even an unofficial connection with this great organization. Their work for our men is magnificent—no one can speak too highly in praise of what they are doing.

At first I sang at their smokers, but found this too much for my throat, so I asked them to keep me on their list for Sunday singing. These services were

always filled to the capacity of the room —the boys listening reverently to the prayers and address, and joining with all their hearts in the hymns. I loved leading the great chorus of their voices, and I always sang two solos. Very often they forgot the bare barrack-room was meant to be a church and would give me deafening applause.

The first Sunday I went about three-quarters of an hour by train from Paris, traveling with the clergyman,—a man well fitted for this work, who had left his church in Connecticut to do his bit—and my accompanist, who was a well-known organist at home. We were met by an officer and a representative of the Y. M. C. A., and taken in a huge French cammion, or motor-truck, five miles to the fort. How I ever got in or out of this "limousine," as they called it,

I will never know,—there were no steps and it was very high from the ground. The men shinnied up—goodness knows what I did!

There were 700 soldiers stationed at this old French fort, the first I had ever seen. The vaulted room in which the service was held was a wonderful place for singing, and our opening hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers," was so gloriously sung by those boys I can never forget the thrill of it. The room was not large enough for all to be present, but it was full. Afterward I had lunch with fourteen officers; these men were all of the Regular Army, and it was most interesting to hear how they had brought their men the great distance from California.

Every Sunday I had an interesting experience, and was sorry to give up

this work. I sang the night before I left for the Midi at a special Easter service in Paris at the beautiful branch of the Y. M. C. A., 31 Avenue Montaigne. The rooms were filled; many of the men expected to leave in a few days for the front.

When I found I would have ten unexpected days in Bordeaux waiting for my steamer, I offered my services for canteen work there with the Y. M. C. A. They have a splendid big building, which was once famous as a gambling place. The rooms are large and spacious, and there is a fine balcony like a big terrace running along one side of the building. The ground floor was used for the restaurant, which was most efficiently run by two young women well known in New York society—they are very young but splendid managers

and faithful to their difficult task. The result is—delicious meals for the soldiers, sailors, Red Cross workers, or anyone in uniform. And it was not unusual to see a General enjoying a good American meal, with butter and white bread and all the sugar desired—luxuries not to be found in any French restaurant. The price for these meals was moderate indeed for the good menu offered.

The *entresol* was devoted to reading and writing rooms, and the first floor to to the entertainment rooms and canteen, where they could get ice cream and cold drinks. Hundreds of men came daily to this place, and in the very hot days in May it was hard to keep enough ice cream ready for the demand. The balcony was on this floor, and with tables and chairs under the awnings was a de-

lightful place for the men to spend the afternoon.

We were only supposed to serve one ice cream or sundae to each man, but the plea to "please give me another for my brother" (meaning himself) was hard to resist, and he generally got his second plate. A small price was charged for all refreshments.

For the first time I came into personal touch with the boys—before I only sang to them, but had no opportunity to talk with them. I found them a splendid lot on the whole, and had great pleasure knowing them. In several cases I wrote to their mothers on my return, for I could say just how they looked, and even where they were, and the answers of these mothers showed me in every case why the sons themselves were so fine.

I made some very good friends during my ten days in Bordeaux, and between their kindness and the enjoyment of my work I had a very happy time.

These seven months spent in war-time France will stand out in my life as a wonderful memory, and what little personal service I was able to render this glorious country through her own people was repaid me a hundred times, and I am full of gratitude to France for the lessons she has taught me.

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